DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 201 010 CS 503 329

AUTHOR Kang, Jack C.
TITLE Oral Interpretation in the Electronic World of Broadcasting.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association (Chicago, IL, April 9-11, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Advertising; Higher Education; Imagery; Language Usage; *Oral Interpretation; *Radio; Speech Communication; *Speech Curriculum; *Speech Skills; Telecommunications; *Television
IDENTIFIERS *Broadcasting Curriculum; *Broadcast Journalism; Persona

ABSTRACT

In a survey of commercial braodcasters, 80% of the respondents felt that university communications majors seeking on-the-air, nonnews jobs were unqualified for their chosen profession. Because teachers of oral interpretation possess the performance expertise that broadcasters need, they must be more actively involved in teaching broadcast performance than they are at present. Two areas in oral interpretation that are important to broadcast performance are persona and imagery. Just as in poetry, the "voice" or persona is never the same from one piece of copy to the next. Students must be made aware that the voice must be congruent with the nature of the product or the corporate image developed in the copy. In the sense that every commercial shares common elements with literature used in oral interpretation, students must be taught to exploit the imagery present in broadcast copy. Students of broadcast performance who become adept at applying the principles of oral interpretation in front of the cameras can make enormous strides in improving the quality of their performance. The adaptation of oral interpretation skills for broadcast performance can be significant to both students and teachers of oral interpretation. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED201010

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ORAL INTERPRETATION IN THE ELECTRONIC WORLD OF BROADCASTING

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jack C. Rang

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Jack C. Rang
Department of Communication Arts
University of Dayton

CSSA , April 9, 1981

CSS033207

It will certainly not come as a shock to anyone to hear that our world is now officially called the electronic age. Given the speed with which we entered this new time it should not be a particulat surprise that, in a survey of commercial broadcasters conducted last year by Arbitron--the American Research Bureau--for the International Radio and Television Society, Inc., eighty percent of the respondents felt that university communications majors seeking on-the-air, non-news jobs were either poorly qualified for their chosen profession or that they were, in fact, unqualified. Where do most of these young people fail? Despite the inroads that the visual elements of television have made on the communication process, the fact remains that the spoken word is still the basic ingredient in broadcasting; as much so now as when electronic media began almost eighty years ago.

If you agree with this premise then I am equally sure that you will agree that broadcasting personnel are now, and always have been, involved in our area of study. And it is because we, the teachers of oral interpretation, possess the performance expertise that broadcasters need that I feel so strongly that we must be more actively involved in the teaching of broadcast performance than we are at present.

My motives in this paper are more than altruistic. There are JOBS out there in the "real world" for students who are trained--well-trained--in the skills of oral interpretation. The job market aside, there remains yet another motivation for our own concern for the application of the principles of our discipline to broadcasting. While we increase our students' marketability we make our expertise relevant in the world our students are entering.

What is that electronic world like? Let me burden you with some statistics which I feel are relevant:

ITEM: There are approximately 78 million homes in this country which have television sets. Of this number almost half have more than one set.

ITEM: There are an estimated 450 million RADIO sets in use in this country. Of that number, 330 million are used in the home, 120 million are portable or automobile radios used outside the home

ITEM: The average television viewer in this country watches over six-and-one-half hours of television per day while the average radio listener is tuned to a favorite station about two-and-one-half hours per day.

ITEM: More homes in this country have radio and television as part of their furnishings than have indoor plumbing--bathtubs and toilets.[1]

On the basis of these figures, drawn from the reports of major research organizations, there can be little doubt, if any ever existed, that the electronic media have become a way of life in the United States. A full ninety-eight percent of us are saturated with broadcasting.

We in oral interpretation have all been challenged by our students who ask what future careers lie ahead as a result of their training in our discipline. After all, there are just so many recital performances for community groups to be found. True, our skills are of real benefit to actors, as Robert Benedetti's book The Actor at Work so clearly illustrates. Unfortunately, those members of Actors Equity who do manage to get jobs each year seldom earn what could really be called a living in the theatre. But then we look at the cover of TIME, the weekly newsmagazine, for February 25, 1980, and there is a picture of Dan Rather, captioned, "The $8,000,000 Man." Our students look at it and say, "That's what I want to be when I grow up!" Can we replace our indulgent smiles with something more positive? The real question is, what are we doing to help those students toward their goals of success in the electronic world? There are jobs out there for trained people. I do NOT mean people who are trained in the hardware of a new technology but people who are both trained and talented in the skills which you and I can provide; skills to make them more employable than those hundreds of others with the same dream.[2]

Do people teaching in the broadcasting area recognize that we have been teaching a skill their students need? Though they may not say so in so many words, the most recent textbooks on broadcast performance point to the need

for interpretation's most basic ingredients. Here is a quote from John Hasling's book, Fundamentals of Radio, published last year by McGraw-Hill:

> . . . your most important job will be to produce the words. . . .
>
> Good . . . announcers are able to read without calling attention to the pages in front of them.
>
> . . . communication comes only through the auditory sense; there is no body language in radio.
>
> As far as the listener is concerned, the voice on the radio is speaking to him or her alone.[3]

Here is a segment from William Hawes' The Performer in Mass Media:

> A reader must evoke a response from an audience. Reading with fluency, interpretation and style takes much practice. Reading requires instant word recognition for meaning and pronunciation. It also requires pacing, and, if the audience is to respond, conveying an understanding by the audience of what the performer has read.[4]

If we eliminate the word "radio" from Hasling's quote we might well have expected to find that these were excerpts from basic oral interpretation texts. We have been teach-broadcasting skills and never knew it.

Let us suppose for a moment that we dwelt in a utopian academic community where there was no jealousy between departments bent on protecting "their" areas of study. Having made our expertise known we are assigned to teach a course in broadcast performance. Where do we begin? Of course, there are as many starting points as there are teachers,

but, being good teachers of interpretation, we search our own texts, only to find that very little attention is given to broadcasting performance at all. On the other hand, we find that most of the authors devote significant space to what I have termed the dynamics of language.

Let us consider the term "dynamics." We may use the word as musicians do, to indicate the relative strengths accorded successive passages in a score. Or we may speak of dynamics as the power of language to evoke rational and emotional or physical response in the reader of listener. When we turn our attention to the literature pertaining to broadcast performance, it quickly becomes apparent that the writers of these texts give scant attention to either of these dynamic dimensions. Busy with equipment, microphones, and tape recorders, they have overlooked the true dynamic potential that resides in language--the potential we know to be present in oral performance. Upon occasion there is an idea that some awareness is there in the broadcasting books, but the authors often seem at a loss to explain either what the potentials are or how the student performer may gain access to those potentials in order to put them to best use. As an example of what I mean, look again at William Hawes' book at the place where he has written:

> If the performer's message is in tune with the listener/viewer's thoughts and feelings, the listener/viewer will be motivated to action: to buy the product, to spontaneous reaction . . . or react in a multitude of ways. Only then has the performer communicated with someone.[5]

And later:

> Words and phrases requiring special emphasis are underlined. Some inflections--a rise or lowering in volume or pitch--may be noted by curved lines above words or at the end of a sentence.[6]

If the reader asks "How does one choose the 'words and phrases requiring special emphasis'?" there is no answer. Hawes neither elaborates nor gives any clues at all regarding the crucial choices performers make.

Though I am sure you have by now run through a whole series of ways in which you would aid the student in unlocking a script/text, let me suggest two possibilities which I see as foremost in the field of oral interpretation and which are equally important to the broadcast performer. I might add that these are "field-tested" approaches, drawn both from my teaching in this area and from my own professional broadcasting experience.

First, we must teach the student to become aware of the unique persona which is resident in each piece of broadcast copy. Second, we must teach the infinity of appeals that are to be found in the sensory and motor imagery within everything we put on the air.

Let us begin with the idea of persona, since it is the least understood concept we offer to those persons outside the field of interpretation. Despite its seeming-difficulty, persona is the most important awareness any performer needs for truly effective communication in any medium. When we teach interpretation we are quite aware that the speaker changes from poem to poem; the persona in the poem is never the speaker at the lectern, even when the speaker and the poet are one and the same. Yet John Hasling illustrates how little this concept is understood in the broadcasting field when he writes in that section of his book which he has titled "Style," "When you read it is important that you be the same person you are when you speak in normal converstaion."[7] I submit that it is just this failure to recognize the uniqueness of each piece of copy that dooms a lot of broadcast performance training to failure. Not only does my eighteen-to-twenty-one-year-old student not know who he is in "normal" conversation, since "normal" keeps changing from one receiver to the next,[8] but also, under this dictum, there is absolutely no latitude for the change that broadcast performance demands. No allowance is made for the fact that no two sponsors or products are exactly alike. If I teach a student to be "himself" on the air I am not training a performer, I am developing a "personality,"

And far too often "persoanlities" turn into "characters," with all the pejorative connotations of self-affection and affectation that term implies.

In order to see how different _personae_ are required from one piece of copy to the next we need to look at two distinctly different commercials.

> At the Country Inn Restaurant, every dish makes
> a simple statement:
> Our Country Inn Prime Rib of Beef . . .
> Thick and plump with natural juices,
> Our Hickory-Smoked Ham . . . Mellow
> Slow-smoked flavor with a spicy-sweet glaze.
> Our Seafood Crepes . . . Delicate, light
> crepes bursting with a thick filling of
> shrimp, fish and scallops.
> Every dish says: Simply delicious!
> At the Country Inn Restaurant, just off
> I-74 at the North Neil Street exit, in Champaign.

and

> Early in this century, German novelist
> Hermann Hesse wove mystical novels like
> _Siddhartha_ and _Steppenwolf_ about man's
> search for identity. Worshipped by the
> students of his own time, Hesse has now
> found a devoted new audience in today's
> college youth. Recently in its "Books"
> section, TIME, the Weekly Newsmagazine,
> examined in depth the Hesse phenomenon:
> his life, the development of his art,
> the extent of his influence. . . .
> The world of books, explored for 24 million
> readers around the globe in TIME--the most
> important magazine to the world's most
> important people.

From whatever standpoint we examine these two commercials, whether from the standpoint of style, content, image appeals,

or simply from product type, it is obvious that there is no intelligent way a sensitive reader/performer can deal with these two pieces of copy with the same "style," any more than they could be presented in anything close to a "normal conversational manner."[8] Clearly, every product sold, each program presented is unique, possessed of its own "voice." In consequence, I must train my students to identify that unique persona, that individual voice that informs every commercial. And in every case I must make the student aware that that voice/speaker must be congruent with the nature of the product or the corporate image developed in the copy. So our beginning point in teaching broadcast performance is to make the student just as aware of the individual speaker in each commercial as we try to make her/him aware of the individualized speaker in a poem.

Certainly one of the important keys to persona in any work is the language which describes his thoughts and actions. In a very interesting and useful book , Peter Orlik discusses various approaches to Broadcast Copywriting.[9] Orlik begins his discussion of copy content by identifying the basic rational and emotional appeals which comprise the core of all broadcast copy. Using the acronym SPACED, Orlik lists his rational appeals: Safety, Performance, Appearance, Comfort, Economy and Durability. He postulates that one

or more of these rational appeals is present in every commercial, public service announcement, even every station break. If we use Orlik's hypothesis it is apparent that, by recognizing the dominance of one or another of these rational appeals, a performer gains a major clue to the nature of the persona that must be created for this product. For example, a range of products, from tires to toothpaste, point out the unique performance, safety, and appearance factors that inhere in each. The speaker whose concern centers on these factors will sound quite different from the speaker who stresses economy, durability, and comfort. In every case the speaker must create and project the "rational" image of an individual concerned with the unique intellectual appeals of this product before persuasion can begin and the motivation to buy can occur. Although physical appearance may be important if the commercial is to be filmed or videotaped, unless there is a clear understanding of the product image--the persona demanded by the copy--even the most perfect physical speciman will not be able to make the sales presentation truly effective.

Copy analysis, syntactic structure, vocabulary/word choices, all are important devices to establish the kind of personality the copy demands. This fact becomes most clear when we look back at the two commercials cited above.

The speaker in the TIME commercial is highly literate, sophisticated, even snobbish in his/her reference to the magazine's circulation--"twenty-four million readers around the globe." Considering the world's present population, this number adds to the sense of an elite readership while still giving the impression that a lot of people, albeit "special" people, read the magazine.[10] By contrast, the speaker in the restaurant copy chooses structures that are redolent with gastronomic images, images that roll around in the mouth and the ears, reach for the taste buds, and aim at a sea of salivation--all in just thirty seconds. There can be little doubt that the broadcast performer, attunded to the dynamics of language and faced with these two commercials, must make major adjustments in the image-<u>persona</u> s/he is projecting if the appeals are to get through to the audience.

Orlik's second set of commercial appeals are already part of the vocabulary of oral interpretation since here he deals with emotional and sensory imagery. For this series Orlik employs the acronym HICCUPSS. The letters here stand for Human Interest, Information, Comedy, Conflict, Uniqueness, Prominence, Sensation, and Sex.

A crying child, a puppy, the Indian with the tear running down his cheek in the Ad Council's anti-litter spot--all qualify as Human Interest. And, since we are curious creatures, every product or organization offers some kind of Information

in order to gain our acceptance through improved understanding of the product.

Comedy is self-evident, ranging as it does from the almost-too successful Alka-Seltzer "Spizy Meataball" ad to Mariette Hartley's irreverent comments to Jim Garner in the Polaroid spots. You, of course, have your own favorites to add. And as for the element of conflict, the airwaves are jammed with Conflict in commercials. Will TIDE get that greasy stain out of that party dress? Will she go out with him now that he is using Close-Up? Will the boss be satisfied with Jello for dessert?

Then there is Uniqueness. Of course, every product is unique! What is the choice if we admit that all detergents are really alike? And just try to tell the lady who does the laundry that her detergent/bleach/fabric softener is really just like every other one of its kind.

How do we define Prominence? Orlik says we could just as well call this term "snob appeal." The ad for TIME, the Weekly Newsmagazine serves well to illustrate the role of prominence in a commercial. It tells us that we are definitely above the rest of society because we have read TIME's Books Section and, as a result, can converse meaningfully about Hermann Hesse. There are many others. "Because you've earned it, Cadillac is for you." If you can't remember the name of the perfume "Je Reviens," all you really need to remember is the name of the maker--Worth. You take one particular cold tablet, vitamin, drink one brand

of coffee or beer or Scotch because YOU are SPECIAL!. Once the announcer/performer becomes aware of the intensity of this "snob appeal," the nature of the speaker becomes more apparent and the copy unfolds in its full effect.

The restaurant copy is an example of yet another kind of appeal. As was pointed out above, this copy is pure SENSATION. The commercial is loaded with gustatory imagery, but there are other equally strong imagery appeals--olfactory, kinesthetic, visual, and even a touch of auditory imagery with what "every dish says." Again, the copy makes special demands on the performer; someone who is a borderline gourmet with, perhaps, a touch of gourmand tossed in for good measure. This voice is certainly very different from the one which exhorted us to be one of the elite by reading a magazine.

We are well into the second major aspect of performance which we as teachers and practitioners of oral interpretation know and use constantly--the area of imagery. There is simply no such thing as a piece of broadcast copy that does NOT deal primarily with imagery. In this sense, every public service announcement and every commercial shares common elements with the best literature we teach in our interpretation classes. If you will, they are all woven from the same threads.

I was most fortunate to have begun my performance career in radio acting. In that medium all of the elements of the field of oral interpretation came together. All images, visual, kinetic,

tactile, all were structured on the ways in which the words, coupled with kinesthetic physical response, were handled in performance. It did not matter that we were reaching a large audience--there really is no such thing as a mass audience: there is only the mass medium by which they are reached. Every listener/viewer sees,hears, and responds as an individual. If the persona I create thinks of the audience as a group-- as "All of you out there in Radioland"--then I can never really reach very many of you out there in Radioland. There is a direct and an intimate link between the images I construct, the persona I create, and the response I get. When someone calls while I am on the air and says, "You sound like a nice person," I have accomplished the task I set out to do--create a favorable image of the station for which I work. And John Hasling is incorrect when he says there is no body language in radio, People can HEAR facial expressions. Years ago I came home from work one afternoon and my ten-year-old daughter said, "When you read that story you were smiling. I could hear you smile." She was right; I was smiling.

Probably one of the greatest vocal image-builders of our time was Charles Laughton. If you've not heard his album, "Tell Me a Story," now out of press, but still around in some libraries, you have missed one of the classic performances in oral interpretation. Laughton was committed to honest, faithful re-creation of the text. He clearly understood the power of language-as-persuasion

in the creation of images. When his First Drama Quartette planned a schedule of public performances Laughton selected as their vehicle the theatrically static, often-cut "Don Juan in Hell," from Shaw's Man and Superman. Because of his commitment to the power of language to evoke images, it is really no surprise that Laughton's production proved as successful as it did. Nor was it surprising to me to find that Eric Bentley's review of the First Drama Quartette in New York drew upon the electronic media for a comparison. Bentley likened the company's work to that of radio actors, pointing out that radio, with its limitations on physical action brought about by the restrictions of the microphone, required what Bentley referred to as "half-acting." But Bentley added, "It takes whole actors to do half acting." We would phrase it differently. It takes complete, trained, and perceptive interpreters to do "half acting."

Students of broadcast performance who become aware of and adept at recognizing the potentials for success when they apply oral interpretation processes and techniques to their air work make enormous strides forward with their skills behind a microphone and before the cameras. We have the skills these students need. The adaptation of those skills can be significant to us and to our students. So, if the prospect of training broadcasters in the skills of oral interpretation excites you, think what adventure lies in store for them!

FOOTNOTES

1
These statistics, in various forms, have been cited in major broadcasting texts. The basic information comes from figures compiled by such research organizations as the American Research Bureau, the Radio Advertising Bureau, and the Television Bureau of Advertising, Inc. The information is collected in the 1980 edition of Broadcasting Yearbook.

2.
Where are the markets for these embryonic millionaires? Broadcasting Yearbook for 1980 lists 8,748 radio stations in operation in this country at the end of 1979. Of these, 4,554 were commercial AM's, 3,155 were commercial FM's and 1,039 were non-commercial FM's. Add to this 1,008 operating television stations, mostly commercial, and you get a market of 9,756 prospective employers for your students. When all of the non-broadcast operations are included--corporations that produce audio and video tapes--are added the market becomes truly staggering.

3
John Hasling, Fundamentals of Radio Broadcasting (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1980), pp. 164-5 and p. 171.

4
William Hawes, The Performer in Mass Media (New York: Hastings House, 1979), p. 15 and p. 181.

5
Hawes, p. 14.

6
Hawes, p. 182.

7.
Hasling, p. 165

8
Most of the current texts in interpersonal communication point out that we shift roles regularly from one conversation partner to the next. There is no way we can define "normal conversational role" without defining the communication context and our role in that communication.

8a
The obvious "character voice" commercials are not even considered in either the Hasling or the Hawes book. Commercials of this type are not our immediate concern here, either, though they would certainly demand attention in a broadcast performance class.

FOOTNOTES (cont'd)

[9] Peter Orlik, Broadcast Copywriting (Boston: Holbrook Press, 1978), passim.

[10] It is interesting to note that the texture and "voice" of TIME's commercials changed abruptly about three years ago in an attempt to broaden their readership-circulation base. When the change was made the old elitism was still there, but it was modified to a comedy approach. Skit/routine commercials still pointed out the superiority of content and, by inference, readership. The blatant elitist attitude was gone.